THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI SUNDER LAL PATWA) : (a) There are 5.04 lakh cooperative societies of various types in India.

(b) National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) submitted a Memorandum to the former Agriculture Minister on 23-12-1999 raising issues relating to (i) framing of National Cooperative Policy, (ii) recognition of Cooperation as a specific sector of Indian economy, (iii) amendments in Cooperation Law, (iv) amendment in Taxation Law, (v) expeditious issue of Licence to Cooperative Bank of India (COBI), (vi) support to Cooperative Credit and Banking Sector, (vii) need for strengthening Consumer Cooperatives, (viii) support to Labour Cooperatives, (ix) support to Industrial/Artisanal Cooperative, and (x) need for Rehabilitation of Sick Cooperative Units.

(c) The role of cooperatives has acquired a new dimension in the changing scenario of globalisation and liberalisation of the nation's economy. The Government, therefore, proposes to evolve a new National Cooperative Policy to facilitate all-round development of the cooperatives and their economic viability. The steps are being taken to bring it out at an early date.

Sikh, Hindu Leaders in House of Lords

*396. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH : Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to a news item captioned "Sikh, Hindu leader in House of Lords" that appeared in the Indian Express dated the 17th January, 2000;

(b) whether it is fact that Sikh and Hindu leaders would be allocated seats in the House of Lords (U.K.); and

(c) if so, what steps Government propose to take up the mattter with the British Prime Minister to make the proposal a success ?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFIARS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Members of the House of Lords are appointed on the recommendation of different party leaders and senior politicians, after approval by the Political Honours Scrutiny Committee. As at present, only representatives of the Church are allocated seats. There are nine members of Indian origin in the House of Lords. One of them, Lord (Tarsem) King, is a Sikh.